

Digital natives and Digital immigrants

A **digital native** is a person who was born after the general implementation of digital technology, and, as a result, has a familiarity with digital technology such as [computers](#), the [Internet](#), [mobile phones](#) and [MP3s](#) over their whole lives. A **digital immigrant** is an individual who was born before the existence of digital technology and adopted it to some extent later. Alternatively, this term can describe people born in the latter [1970s](#) or later, as the [Digital Age](#) began at that time; but in most cases the term focuses on people who grew up with [21st Century](#) technology. This term has been used in several different contexts, such as [education](#) ([Bennett, Maton & Kervin 2008](#)) (in association with the term New Millennium Learners ([OECD 2008](#))).

As Dr. Ofer Zur and Azzia Zur [discuss](#) (in 2009), not all digital immigrants are technologically inept, as they fall into a number of categories; **Avoiders, Reluctant Adopters and Eager Adopters.**

Avoiders may only have a minimal amount of technology involved in their lives and households (Ex. A landline phone and a television).

Reluctant Adopters often see ways that technology might be needed in their lives, but they try to avoid it when possible.

Eager Adopters have enthusiasm or a talent for technology that makes them very similar to Digital Natives.

Similarly, not all digital natives are comfortable with technology.

Origins

[Marc Prensky](#) coined the term *digital native* in his work *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants* published in 2001. In his seminal article, he assigns it to a new group of students enrolling in educational establishments.^[1] The term draws an [analogy](#) to a country's [natives](#), for whom the local religion, language, and folkways are natural and indigenous, compared with [immigrants](#) to a country who often are expected to adapt and begin to adopt the region's customs. Prensky refers to *accents* employed by digital immigrants, such as printing documents rather than commenting on screen or printing out emails to save as a hard copy. Digital immigrants are said to have a "thick accent" when operating in the digital world in distinctly pre-digital ways, for instance, calling someone on a telephone to ask if they have received a sent [e-mail](#). A digital native might refer to their new "camera"; but a digital immigrant might refer to their new "digital camera".

The analogy of the digital native was also used by [Josh Spear](#) and Aaron Dignan (Spear's business partner in the Manhattan-based agency [Undercurrent](#)) who talked about people who were "**born digital**", first appearing in a series of presentations given by Josh Spear in 2007. First, at Google's Zeitgeist^[2] Europe Conference in May 2007. A different version of this presentation was delivered again in December 2007 at the United Kingdom at the Internet Advertising Bureau Engage 2007 Conference.^[3] A [Digital Native research project](#) is being run jointly by the [Berkman](#)

[Centre for Internet & Society](#) at [Harvard Law School](#) and the Research Center for Information Law at the [University of St. Gallen](#) in Switzerland.

[Gartner](#) presented on the term at their May, 2007 IT Expo (Emerging Trends) Symposium in Barcelona and, ^[4] more recently, Gartner referenced Prensky's work, specifically the 18 areas of change comprising the Work Style of Digital Natives, in their "IT-Based Collaboration and Social Networks Accelerate R&D" research paper published on January 22, 2008.

Discourse

Not everyone agrees with the language and underlying connotations of the *digital native*. It suggests a familiarity with technology that not all children and young adults who would be considered digital natives have, though some instead have an awkwardness with technology that not all digital immigrants have. It entirely ignores the fact that the digital universe was conceived of, pioneered, and created by the *digital immigrants*. In its application, the concept of the digital native preferences those who grow up with technology as having a special status, ignoring the significant difference between familiarity and creative application.

Crucially, there is debate over whether there is any adequate evidence for claims made about *digital natives* and their implications for education. [Bennett, Maton & Kervin \(2008\)](#), for example, critically review the research evidence and describe some accounts of *digital natives* having an academic form of a [moral panic](#). Using such a terminology is rather a sign of unfamiliarity and exoticism in relation to digital culture. Of course, nobody is "born digital"; as with any cultural technology, such as reading and writing, it is matter of access to education.

It considers that all youths are digital natives in the modern age. However, this is not the case. It is primarily based on cultural differences and not by age. According to Henry Jenkins (2007), "Part of the challenge of this research is to understand the dynamics of who exactly is, and who is not, a digital native, and what that means." There are underlying conflicts on the definition of the term "digital natives" and it is wrong to say that all modern age youths are placed in that particular category or that all older adults can be described as digital immigrants.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_native